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Poems 1967-68 is a collection of poems, translations from French and Spanish poetry, and poems for children. The diversity of the work is the result of the search for my own style and of my various explorations in poetry. My influences range from an early reading of William Butler Yeats to selections of Japanese and Spanish poetry to the poetry of Theodore Roethke and Gary Snyder, and although I am familiar with the contemporary "schools" of poetry, I hope that my poetry will not be mistaken for them. I have not been guided by any particular artistic intentions, except the desire to record my own versions of reality and the whim of my imagination, imagination being, after all, the key to poetry and thus a fruitful path to be followed.

Presented to
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Approved by

Robert W. Watson
March 1968

POEMS 1967-68

by

Richard Lebovitz

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Robert W. Watson
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following
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The poems "In Grandmother's Room" and "Sky Dive"
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POEMS 1967-68	1
Evening Perspective	2
The Children and the Glass-artist	3
In Grandmother's Room	4
Sky Dive	5
Frank	6
Excursion	7
Executives and Secretaries	8
Traveler	9
At Half Time in Junior High	10
The Cricket's Lament	11
The Sign of What Is	12
TRANSLATIONS	13
The Bell	14
The Lover	15
On the Way of Death	16
At Breakfast	17
The Road	18
For You My Love	19
"From the polished mirror of the water"	20
"In luminous aftermath"	21
"The wind summoned by heart, the wind of joy"	22
Campos de Suria (IX)	23
Proverbios y Cantares (XVIII)	24
Memento	25
POEMS FOR CHILDREN	26
Who Walked Out and Who Waited In	27
Tell Me	28
Red Girl	29
Silly Sally	30
Sam Sall	31
Two Little Wags	32
The Witch	33
The Bawling Brumma	34
Knock and Miss	35
Goodly the Doll	36
The Lure	37

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
POEMS 1967-68	1
Evening Perspective	2
The Children and the Glass-cutter	3
In Grandmother's Room	4
Sky Dive	6
Wreck	7
Requiem	8
Executives and Secretaries	9
Traveler	10
At Half Time in Junior High	11
The Cricket's Lament	12
The Sigh of What Is	13
TRANSLATIONS	19
The Bells	20
The Lover	21
On the Way of Death	22
At Breakfast	23
The Dunce	25
For You My Love	26
"From the cadenced murmur of the wave..."	27
"O luminous afternoon!..."	28
"The wind summoned my heart, one clear day..."	29
Campos de Soria (IV)	30
Proverbios y Cantares (XXVIII)	31
Memento	32
POEMS FOR CHILDREN	33
Who Walked Out and Who Walked In	34
Tall Tim	35
Sad Sid	36
Silly Sally	37
Sam Small	38
Two Little Dogs	39
The Witch	40
The Bucking Bronco	41
Skunks and Minks	42
Snedly the Snail	43
The Zebra	45

POEMS 1967-68

EVENING PERSPECTIVE

To the child on the moon,
Stars hovered on tremulous wings.

To the child on earth,
Moths were white stars flickering.

THE CHILDREN AND THE GLASS-CUTTER

The huddled glass-cutter
 Over his diamond edged stone,
 Spinning sparks that played
 Upon the stone's keen edge,
 Was glassed in the children's wonder
 Till their stares turned to glass
 And Johnny! Sarah!
 Broke their brittle eyes.

And I often wonder if she noticed,
 When she touched, my hair as red,
 Or even if she touched,
 Somehow I smiled, and she smiled,
 Only smiles change too.
 Yet we smiled at one another,
 What seemed the longest while.
 Then as if her effort
 Had taken something more
 Than strength or will,
 She was taken back again.
 Her throat quivered a little.

IN GRANDMOTHER'S ROOM still.

The sun was slipping out the blinds.

And she said, simply, "Close them before you go."

Whatever I would have said,
I thought of nothing to say.
She had wrested fingers
Thin as needles from the sheet
And reached to rub my head,
As she had done in other days.
It was all I could stand
To feel hands I knew so strange.
And I often wonder if she noticed,
When she touched, my hair on end,
Or even if she touched.
Somehow I smiled, and she smiled,
Only smiles change too.
But we smiled at one another,
What seemed the longest while.
Then as if her effort
Had taken something more
Than strength or will,
She was taken back again.
Her throat quavered a little.

I remember the beauty still.
 The sun was slipping out the blinds,
 And she said, simply, "Close them before you go."
 "I will," I said. "I will."

SKY DIVE

He looked down
Into mouths open wide;
They looked up
With mouths open wide,
The father, the mother,
Two sisters, the brother,
Assembled under his sky.

Then the mouth of the father closed,
And the mother and sisters cried;
And the brother stood where he stood,
Where sky was empty of cloud or bird,
Where sky was empty of sky.

WRECK

Rainbows of oil slick the seascape.

Wave caps glint like fins.

The sea roar rushes on the sandspit,

Hushes, No gulls squawk.

Among orange rinds, a spar bobs free.

Over arms of seaweed

Scuttle the nameless crustaceans.

REQUIEM

Nobody could win, nobody could lose;
We played the war, we drank our booze.
Our feet got sore, we took off our shoes.
Inside our billets, gambling our bullets,
We played the damn war through.

EXECUTIVES AND SECRETARIES

Nobody thinks that the elevator thinks:
The last foot on, the tired doors blink;
The long descent at the end of the week.
And how good to get a load of feet off!

TRAVELER

I see a woman's hands
I have seen before,

as they draw near,
become unfamiliar:

the plains and valleys;
river that never ends.

I dream I am lost and fall asleep,
dreaming of home.

AT HALF TIME IN JUNIOR HIGH

It is the championship game,
and we are losing 14-6.
Rushing from the crisp field
into the locker room,
we feel as if bathed in steam.

We huff, and stamp like heifers.
Our coach follows, his ball face
flushed.

He says real low,

"Horseshit!"

and knocks the fullback
against the lockers.
Beneath shoulder pads, hip pads,
thigh pads, and helmets,
our flesh tingles,
and we clench our skinny fists.

THE CRICKET'S LAMENT

I wait in a tuft of grass
at the foot of the steps

listening to the rocker
creak on the porch.

Every night she rocks
and sings low hymns;

her voice has the timbre
of rain in a can.

I wait in a tuft of grass,
and while she dreams,

I repeat her hymns.

THE SIGH OF WHAT IS

1

Insects have eaten tiny ponds in these leaves.
Through them, I see birds swimming in the sky.

2

You would think the way familiar,
but I cannot find the stream
I hear so near....
The forests of ferns are silent;
I must stop and ask an ant
the way.

3

Icicles tremble

at the edge of the eaves;

a film of water

appears in the water bucket.

The drippings of trees

--music of a xylophone!

4

Ribbons of sleet

dribble from the eaves.

Against the oaken door,

a collie huddles.

5

My mind is clear
of care or want
--the mountain air!

Turtle stones
appear in waves of ferns
that rush together,
hush together.

Thunder.
The voice of my father
when I was a child.

A stream dashes
from the rocks
(a frightened animal)
into the brush.

Rain comes in fistfuls
against my cheeks,
into my waiting palms.

6

--So clear an afternoon!

I run my finger round the rim of the sky
and it rings like crystal!

7

Kneeling to drink at a shallow pool
makes minnows scatter like light.

My lips send rings across the water.

After, all is clear:

each grain of sand

A weed floats by,

floats by to the sea....

8

Near a tree singing with sparrows
and redbirds nesting in hemlock boughs.
Between that world and me,
the metallic pupil of my eye.

9

NIGHTFALL

What I am feeling begins
from no beginning, as a wave on the ocean.
It comes rushing from the back of my mind like water
through a cave, yet surely I shall drown.

Then it is night;
I am gazing beyond stars.

10

The laughter of tall grass
and see the couple there.
While the moon, a pale grin,
scales the blue cliffs,
they drown with the sun
in the meadow's gold waters.

11

SPRING

I hear on my walk
the note of a bird I cannot see.
As if the sun had taken its gold
and fashioned a slender flute
that could breathe one long note.
It rises at the end of February
wedding earth and sky.

THE BELLS

By handsome types my lover
 Listened to the bells that ring
 Sadly we loved each other
 Thinking no one had seen
 But we were badly hidden
 For all the bells around
 Saw from the tops of the towers
 And now are telling the town
 Tomorrow Cyrille and Catherine
 Gertrude Virelle and Henri
 The baker's wife and her husband
 And then my cousin Marie

TRANSLATIONS

Will smile when I pass by
 I shall not know where to go
 You will be far I shall cry
 I shall die perhaps

Guillaume Apollinaire,
 from ALCANTARA (1929)

THE BELLS

My handsome gypsy my lover
Listen to the bells that ring
Madly we loved each other
Thinking no one had seen

But we were badly hidden
For all the bells around
Saw from the tops of the towers
And now are telling the town

Tomorrow Cyprien and Catherine
Gertrude Ursule and Henri
The baker's wife and her husband
And then my cousin Marie

Will smile when I pass by
I shall not know where to go
You will be far I shall cry
I shall die perhaps

Guillaume Apollinaire,
from ALCOOLS (1920)

THE LOVER

She is standing on my eyelids
And her hair is in mine,
She has the shape of my hands,
She has the color of my eyes,
She is swallowed in my shadow
As a stone on the sky.

Her eyes are always open
And she never lets me sleep.
Her dreams in broad day
Make suns evaporate,
Make me laugh, cry and laugh,
Speak with nothing to say.

Paul Eluard, from CAPITALE
DE LA DOULEUR (1926)

ON THE WAY OF DEATH

On the way of Death,
My mother encountered a vast ice flow ;
She wished to speak,
It was already too late,
A vast floe like cotton wadding.
She looked at my brother and me,
And then she cried.
We told her -- lie truly absurd --
that we understood.
She had such a gracious smile, of a young
girl,
Who was really she,
Such an amusing smile, almost impish ;
Then she was taken into the Opaque.

Henri Michaux, from
UN CERTAIN PLUME (1930)

AT BREAKFAST

He put coffee
In the cup
He put milk
In the cup of coffee
He put sugar
In the cafe au lait
With the little spoon
He stirred
He drank the cafe au lait
And he set down the cup
Without speaking to me
He lit
A cigarette
He blew rings
Of smoke
He put the ashes
In the ashtray
Without speaking to me
Without looking at me
He got up

He put
His hat on his head
He put on
His raincoat
Because it was raining
And he left
In the rain
Without a word
Without looking at me
And I I took
My head in my hands
And I cried.

Jacques Prevert,
from PAROLES (1946)

Jacques Prevert,
from PAROLES (1946)

THE DUNCE

He says no with his head
but yes with his heart
he says yes to what he loves
but no to the teacher
he is standing
one questions him
and all the problems are given
suddenly he is seized with laughter
and erases everything
numbers and words
dates and names
sentences and trick questions
and in spite of the teacher's threats
and the jeers of the A-students
with chalks of all colors
on the blackboard of unhappiness
he draws the visage of happiness.

Jacques Prevert,
from PAROLES (1946)

FOR YOU MY LOVE

I went to the bird market

And I bought some birds

For you

my love

I went to the flower market

And I bought some flowers

For you

my love

I went to the scrap market

And I bought some chains

Some heavy chains

For you

my love

Then I went to the slave market

And I looked for you

But I did not find you

my love.

Jacques Prevert,
from PAROLES (1946)

"FROM THE CADENCED MURMUR OF THE WAVE..."

From the cadenced murmur of the wave
and the lowing of the wind;
from the uncertain reflection that illumines
forest and cloud;
from the call of some passing bird;
from the wild, unnamable fragrance
that the west wind steals
from valley or summit,
these are worlds in which souls
that feel the weight of
the world find refuge.

Rosalia de Castro, from

EN LAS ORILLAS DEL SAR (1884)

"O LUMINOUS AFTERNOON!..."

O luminous afternoon!
 The air is enchanted.
 The white stork
 dozes in flight,
 and the swallows criss-cross, spreading
 pointed wings in the gilded wind,
 and move away in the smiling afternoon
 flying, dreaming

And there is one that turns back like an arrow,
 pointed wings spread in the somber air,
 seeking its dark nook under the roof.

The white stork,
 like a child's scribble,
 still and misshapen, so absurd!
 over the bell tower.

Antonio Machado, from
SOLEDADES, GALERIAS Y OTROS
POEMAS (1899-1907)

"THE WIND SUMMONED MY HEART, ONE CLEAR DAY..."

The wind summoned my heart, one clear day,
with a fragrance of jasmine.

--In exchange for this aroma,
I want all the aroma of your roses.

--I have no roses; there are no flowers
in my garden now: all have died.

--I will carry away the weeping of the fountains,
the yellow leaves and withered petals.

And the wind fled... My heart was bleeding...
Soul, what have you made of your poor garden?

Antonio Machado, from
SOLEDADES, GALERIAS Y OTROS
POEMAS (1899-1907)

CAMPOS DE SORIA

IV

Figures of the field upon the sky!
Two slow oxen are plowing
on a hill, in the beginning of autumn,
and between the black heads, bent
under the heavy yoke,
hangs a hamper of rushes and broomstraw,
the cradle of a child;
and behind the oxen plods
a man leaning toward the earth,
and a woman throwing seed
in the open furrows.
Beneath a cloud of carmine and flame,
in the fluid green-gold
of the west, the shadows grow gigantic.

Antonio Machado, from
CAMPOS DE CASTILLE (1907-17)

PROVERBIOS Y CANTARES

XXVIII

Every man has two
battles to fight:
in dreams, with God;
and awake, with the sea.

Antonio Machado, from
CAMPOS DE CASTILLE (1907-17)

MEMENTO

When I die,
bury me with my guitar
under the sand.

When I die,
among orange trees
and mint.

When I die,
bury me if you wish
in a weathervane.

When I die!

Federico Garcia Lorca,
from POEMA DEL CANTE JONDO
(1921)

POEMS FOR CHILDREN

WHO WALKED OUT AND WHO WALKED IN

Who walked out? Oh who walked out?

A man so stout, so very stout,
It seemed a house was walking out.

Who walked in? Oh who walked in?

A man so thin, so very thin,
It seemed a pin was walking in.

TALL TIM

Tall Tim,
What happened to him?
He bumped his head
On a very tall limb.

His hat fell off,
And he fell down;
And now Tall Tim
Is flat on the ground.

SAD SID

Sad Sid,
Know what he did?
He heard me laugh
And ran and hid.

Sad Sid,
Come out to play!
"No, no!" said Sid,
"I'm sad today!"

SILLY SALLY

Silly Sally,
What did she do?
She walked in the mud
And stuck her shoe.

Silly Sally,
What is wrong?
"It's my poor shoe,
It won't move on!"

SAM SMALL

Sam Small,
What did he say?
"I'm feeling as tall
As my dog, today!"

So Sam went out,
But ran back in--
His dog at his heels
Still bigger than him.

TWO LITTLE DOGS

One little dog, a Chihuahua dog,
Ran to the gate and wah wah wahed.
Another dog, a Terrier dog,
Sat by the gate and listened with awe.

THE WITCH

There was a wicked, wicked Witch
Who loved to sing this ditty:
"To play with Bats and Bugs is fun,
And Toads and Slugs are pretty!"

THE BUCKING BRONCO

The Bronco bucked,
And up I went,
And up up up
Till up was spent.

Then

down

down

down

And down I came.
While Bronco laughed
His eyes aflame.

SKUNKS AND MINKS

The fur of the Skunk's
As rare as the Mink's.
But Minks make mittens
And Skunks make stinks.

SKUNKS AND MINKS

The fur of the Skunk's
As rare as the Mink's.
But Minks make mittens
And Skunks make stinks.

SNEDLY THE SNAIL

Snedly the Snail
Slid off a rail,
Tumbled and tumbled,
Fell in a pail.

The pail was deep,
The sides were steep,
And Snedly the Snail
Began to weep.

He wept all day
(Stopped twice to pray)
Until he had wept
His fears away.

Big were his fears,
Big fell his tears;
The rim of the pail
And snail drew near.

Snedly the Snail
Swam out the pail
And never again
Climbed on a rail.

THE ZEBRA

The Zebra is striped black and white,
Except when he's been in a fight.
Then, as we're told by his friend the Gnu,
The Zebra is striped black and blue.